

## REMARKS

This is intended as a full and complete response to the Office Action dated December 30, 2002, having a shortened statutory period for response set to expire on March 30, 2003. Claims 1-6 and 16-26 have been cancelled without prejudice, and claims 27-33 have been added. No new matter has been introduced. Please reconsider the claims pending in the application for reasons discussed herein.

Applicant would like to thank the Examiner for extending his time to conduct the Examiner Interview on March 10, 2003 with the Applicant's representatives. Although no agreement was reached, the Applicant believes the interview clarified issues that will eventually lead to the allowance of the application.

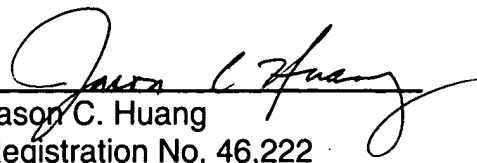
Claims 1-6 and 16-26 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over WO 96/37681 in view of *Patrick*. The Examiner states that WO 96/37681 discloses a tubular connection according to claim 1, except that it does not disclose that the slotted end portions at each end of the connector are threaded for threading to the nodes of respective end portions. The Examiner also states that *Patrick* discloses providing two threaded end sections to a connector so that the connector can join a male and a female tubing as well as two male ends.

WO 96/37681 discloses a connector assembly having a first part and a second part for mounting on the end of a respective tubing. The free ends of the first and second parts may engage with each other to connect the tubings. *Patrick* discloses an improved seal ring for using with a fitting. *Patrick* does not disclose that the fitting is expandable. Figure 1 shows a fitting connectable between two female ends of two tubulars. The references, neither alone nor in combination, teach, show, or suggest an expandable connection between two slotted tubulars, the connection formed by co-joining the ends of the tubulars to form a connection region having a non-overlapping slots, as recited in new claim 27. Also, the references, neither alone nor in combination, teach, show, or suggest a first and second connection members being inter-engagable and a substantially cylindrical member disposed adjacent the inter-engaged first and second connection members, as recited in new claim 29. Further, the references, neither alone nor in combination, teach, show, or suggest a first and second connection

members being inter-engageable along a first substantially cylindrical surface, and a second tubular member adjacent a portion of the inter-engaged first and second connection members along a second substantially cylindrical surface, as recited in new claim 30. Therefore, Applicant believes the claims are in condition for allowance and respectfully requests allowance of the same.

In conclusion, the references cited by the Examiner, neither alone nor in combination, teach, show, or suggest the apparatus of the present invention. Having addressed all issues set out in the office action, Applicant respectfully submits that the claims are in condition for allowance and respectfully requests that the same be allowed.

Respectfully submitted,

  
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